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Sri Meikandan Siddhanta Conference

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THESIS BY

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THANKS to the earlier translation of the works of Sankara, it was his school of Vedanta that has come to be identified with Indian thought in the minds of most Westerners. The other schools of Vedanta are slowly coming, in their turn, for recognition. Except, however, for occasional notices, the Saiva Siddhanta remains still in oblivion. A systematic study of this school of thought is not possible for the Westerners. It is a Tamilian school of thought and most of the works are in Tamil. It is only recently that Tamil is gaining its proper place in the scheme of things. For getting a proper perspective, one must have all the necessary literature. Even the source books have not all of them seen the light of day. An important commentary on Sivagnana Siddhiar by one of the great saints of Dharmapuram Mutt *viz* வெள்ளியம்பலவாணத் தம்பிரான் has still to be printed. Fortunately, the Mutts which were keeping the Sacred Literature, from the profane gaze of the market place, as

their close preserve, have realised at last the necessity for publishing and popularising them. Thanks to the timely attempt of this mutt, this famous commentary may be available to the public at an early date.

Therefore, the history of this school of thought has yet to be written. But one cannot assess the value of the contribution of the Sivagnanabodham to Indian thought, except when placed in its historical perspective. The merest outline may, however, be attempted to be traced. The civilisation of Sindh, as revealed by the excavations at Mohenjodaro and Harappa, is older than Indo-European civilisation There the seeds of Saivite thought had already begun to sprout. The Lord of creation with all the souls at his feet, representing the the conception of Pasupathi (பசுபதி)—the Silent watcher as the great Master representing the conception of Dakshinamoorthi—the Brahmini bull representing the sacred worship of Nandi—the Great mother representing the conception of Divine love-these ideas probably had already developed into creeds. Everytime one thinks of Dakshinamoorthi, plain living and high thinking involved in the life of meditation, are set as the goal of every seeker after truth. God is not above truth. He is Himself a Seer lost in its contemplation. The idea of

unity of creation and God's power of knowledge are involved in the conception of (பசுபதி) Pasupathi. Divinity of all creation demanding our reverence and love and leading to a happy communion and hearty co-operation in this world is involved in the conception of the Sacred Bull. The idea of love as the fundamental principle of the universe is involved in the conception of the Divine Mother.

These slowly influenced the Vedic thought. There was no longer any derision of phallic worship. The praise of Siva as the summum bonum of life came to be sung, in the Svetesvataropanishad. Beef eating gave place to worship of the cow. The conscious unity amidst a show of plurality was strengthened by Vedic thought. Tantras and Agamas are said to preserve the pre-Aryan thought and these grow in number and volume in their passage through time.

Dr. Grierson tells us that the word Siva itself is Dravidian in its origin; probably it is another form of the Tamil word "Seyon" (சேயோன்) the Red, which came to be translated into Rudra. சேயோன் Seyon, according to Tolkappiyam is no other than Muruga. The conception of Muruga as the unchanging youth, the eternal bliss, the omniscient divinity

and perfect love, shining in and through every sensual pleasure which is but a reflection or an echo of divinity, is a great Tamilian contribution, as may be proved by reference to the dictionary meaning of this word or by a study of Tirumurugattruppadai, the universal Bible of the Tamilians. This conception, thus, carries forward the ideals of the Sindh civilisation. The creator and the created do not form a duality. Knowledge becomes one with love. There is no other - worldliness here. Nor is this a Bohemian life. When the out look is changed and passions are sublimated, divinity shines every where.

This leads on to the theory of Ashta Murta or the octave of divine forms which is represented as the quintessence of Saivism in Manimekhalai. The five mighty elements of the world which feed us with pleasures and kindle in us all the feeling of wonder and awe and reverence for the unknown power, every time our sense organs come in contact with them, the shining glories of the sun and the moon which we see higher up in the firmament and which lead us on to the conception of infinity, that which shines more than all these the soul whose very form is the resplendent intelligence - all these form the Temple of God. This is not dry pantheism

but a rich poetic vision which is equally a divine vision. The world ceases to be a snare and a delusion. The three fundamental categories of God, Soul and Universe stand transformed into a perfect union. Meykandar's disciple Manavachakam Kadantar (மனவாசகங் கடந்தார்) proclaims this great truth:—

"முத்திதனில் மூன்று முதலும் மொழியக்கேள்
சுத்தஅனு போகத்தைத் துய்த்தலணு—மெத்தவே
இன்பங் கொடுத்தல்இறை இத்தைவினை வித்தல்மலம்
அன்புடனே கண்டுகொள் அப்பா"

Those who have gained this vision, no more suffer from the world of bondage or the universe of sorrow.

"எட்டுக் கொண்டார்தமைத் தொட்டுக் கொண்டே நின்றூர்
விட்டா ருலகம்என் றுந்தீபற,
வீடே வீடாகுமென் றுந்தீபற"—உய்யவந்ததேவ நாயனூர்

Thus sings Uyyavandadeva Nayanar in another Saiva Siddhanta work. Here there is no running away from the world on which you stand, for you cannot; such kind of negative renunciation has no meaning.

அஞ்சும் அடக்கடக் கென்பர் அறிவிலார்
அஞ்சும் அடக்கும் அமரரும் அங்கிலை
அஞ்சும் அடக்கில் அசேதன மாமென்றிட்டு
அஞ்சு மடக்கா அறிவு அறிந்தேனே. —திருமந்திரம்

Negation leads to the great void; subli-

mation of the desire throws open the gates of heaven, here and now.

There is another truth involved in this conception, a truth of great value, immense importance and supreme significance to the world. The ideal, be it noted, is not merely individual perfection; salvation is to be social and universal ; it is a communion with all the souls and all nature in their divine unity. Sings Pattinathar,

"என்னையும் கண்டேன் பிறரையும் கண்டேன்
நின்னிலை யினைத்தையும் கண்டேன், என்னை!
நின்னைக் காணு மாந்தர்
தம்மையுங் காணுத் தன்மை யோரே"

This is explained at length in the commentary on the 10th sutra of Sivagnanabodham. This theory of Ashtamurta as a Tamilian conception has been adopted by the Alwars and has become an Indian creed in the hands of Kalidasa and others.

The relationship of God to this Temple of His is analysed by the seer and the Advaita of Meikandar is the result. This Advaita of Meikandar is unique, as a harmony of all warring creeds. There is here monism, qualified monism and dualisim. Reduced to words, these creeds seem to be contradictory. But the Absolute will cease to be so, if it

cannot resolve these contradictions in its wonderful harmony. This theory of Meikandar's Advaita, is explained by that great master of exposition, Umapathi Sivam, thus:—

புறச்சமயத் தவர்க்கிருளாய் அகச்சமயத் தொளியாய்ப்
புகலளவைக் களவாகிப் பொற்பணிபோல் அபேதப்
பிறப்பிலதாய் இருள்வெளிபோற் பேதமும் சொற்பொருள்போல்
பேதாபே தமுமின்றிப் பெருநூல் சொன்ன
அறத்திறனல் வினவதாய் உடலுயிர்கண் அருக்கன்
அறிவொளிபோற் பிரிவறு மத்துவித மாகும்
சிறப்பினதாய் வேதாந்தத் தெளிவாம் சைவ
சித்தாந்தத் திறன்இங்குத் தெரிக்க லுற்றும்.

The illustrations given in this song explain the organic unity representing Spiritual Statics, the active monism representing the Spiritual Dynamics, and also the spiritual communism of living communion and divine co-operation with the Being through Becoming representing the Spiritual History. Here is thus established in the place of absolutism and tyranny, so well known in other religions, a real spiritual democracy of love and learning. Perfection is in the union and no where else. It is this spiritual conviction of Divine Experience which makes the Tamilian Alvar (திருமழிசை ஆழ்வார்) proclaim.

"இன்றுக நாளையே யாக இனிச்சிறி தும்
நின்றுக நின்னருள் என்பாலதே—நன்றுக

நான் உன்னையன்றி இலேன்கண்டாய் காரணனே
நீ என்னை யன்றி இலை"

It is in the self same spirit Pattinathar (பட்டினத்தார்) also sings the great Magna Carta of Spiritual Democracy. The poem beginning with the words 'புண்ணிய புராதன' is too big to be quoted in full and therefore the closing lines are alone given.

"ஐந்து புலன்களும் ஆர ஆர்ந்து
மைந்தரும் ஒக்கலும் மனமகிழ்ந் தோங்கி
இவ்வகை இருந்தோ மாயினும் அவ்வகை
மந்திர எழுத்தைந்தும் வாயிடை மறவாது
சிந்தை நின்வழி செலுத்தலின் அந்த
முத்தியும் இழந்திலம் முதல்வ! அத்திறம்
நின்னது பெருமை யன்றே என்னின்
வல்லா னொருவன் கைம்முயன் றெறியினும்
மாட்டா னொருவன் வாளா எறியினும்
நிலத்தின் வழாஅக் கல்லேபோல்
நலத்தின் வழார்நின் நாமம் நவின்றேரே."

These lines form in addition a poetic commentary on the implications of the theory of Ashtamurta. These remind us of Meikandar's words:—

"அவைதாம் ஊசல் கயிறு அற்றுல் தரையே
யாம் துணையான்"

God and soul have been often compared by the poets all the world over, to a loving couple, God representing the active man and soul the

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passive woman. Saivism though singing in the same strain to explain the beginning stages of spiritual progress, does not accept this interpretation of activity and passivity, as final. According to this school, Soul is the man and God his lady love. That is the metaphysical interpretation of Thirukkovaiyar (திருக்கோவையார்). This does not mean that the Saivites do not believe in the surrunder of self to God. What the Vaishnavites call (சரணாகதி) Saranagati is translated into Saivite phraseology as (ஆத்ம நிவேதனம்) Atmanivedanam.

"காயிற் கடையாம் காயேனை நயந்து நீயே ஆட்கொண்டாய்
மாயப் பிறவி உன்வசமே வைத்திட் டிருக்கும் அதுவன்றி
ஆயக் கடவேன் நானேதான் என்ன தோஇங் கதிகாரம்
காயத் திடுவாய் உன்னுடைய கழற்கீழ் வைப்பாய் கண்ணுதலே"

So sings Manikkavasagar. Sivagrayogi uses the very word (பிரபத்தி) Prapatti made much of by the Vaishnavites in this connection, in his Sivaneri Prakasam (சிவநெறிப் பிரகாசம்). Therefore, the attitude under reference is not opposed to this. It is not sheer arrogance of self but confidence in God. That apart, this conception of spiritual democracy deserves to be delivered as a message to the present day world.

" அவனே தானே யாகிய அந்நெறி
எக ஞகி இறைபணி நிற்க
மலமாயை தன்னெடு வல்வினை யின்றே "

is indeed a great message.

God is the supreme experience. It is the fundamental datum. It, therefore, cannot be the subject matter of logical or scientific analysis. The axiom cannot be demonstrated. Our knowledge is relative but our experience, if real, is absolute. Our experience in the present level, is impure and is a series of sensations. But divine experience is not a mere sensation. God cannot be seen but only experienced. There is a beautiful Tamil word "உணர்வு" representing this Paragnana (பரஞானம்) or intuition, not to be confused with instinct, as contrasted with அறிவு or ordinary knowledge. In the realm of poetry and art, one gets a glimpse of this intuition but never in its pure form. There are thus two poles in our conciousness, intuition and knowledge. Sivagnanabodham consists therefore of two parts, the first half dealing with general or relative or finite knowledge of the work-a-day world and the second half dealing with the absolute experience of the mystic.

Proofs are offered and definitions attempted, to start with, from the relative point of

view. There, it speaks the language of the world. The position is clearly pragmatic. Births and deaths, misery and change, these set us a-thinking. They send us in search of a remedy. God is a pragmatic truth. There is even here in this world an order shining in and through Nature seemingly omnipotent, leading on to the various states of conciousness. Real truth is vouchsafed to us, as it were, in a dream of the supreme state. There is therefore an inner principle vivifying the whole scheme of things.

The outer principle of the Universe and the inner principle of Godhead gain a meaning and significance-possibly a pragmatic value again-only through the soul who alone realises their interplay. The position althrough is equally realistic. But ultimately there is also idealism when one expresses the means and ends of the realisation. From pragmatism, through realism, on to idealism, the Saiva Siddhanta takes us all on a holy pilgrimage and therein, these find their respective level and value, completion and harmony. Utility alone cannot make a thing true and real; the pragmatic truth must also be the absolute truth, to be so called. The finite knowledge of the Realists is but a warped knowledge. They know not of the absolute knowledge

of the mystics and that is why they deny it. When the real truth dawns, there comes in its wake, the infinite knowledge of the idealist and the mystic. To talk of it in the market place is to run mad ; and that is the fault of idealism.

This distinction, therefore, between பொது and உண்மை is fundamental. It denies that God can be a matter of knowledge and yet it asserts He can be experienced. God cannot be expressed in a logical formula; he cannot be brought to the discharge tube. Science and logic deal with logical constructions which have no reality beyond them. God, on the other hand, is a reality as an experience of the mystic. The dead bones of the dry arguments of self-conceited logic are only for the hungry bite of the barking dogs of futile debate of all smoke and no light. The eternal intoxication of divine bliss is the actual fact of the real experience of the clear sighted mystic. Experience and not debate is conclusive.

Sivgnanabodham, consisting as it does of only 41 lines, is the shortest of the religious or philosophical works now extant in this world. The Gita, compared to this, is mammoth like. Sivagnanabodham represents the quintessence of the mystic expereince of Meikandar. But in the dark days of the Middle Ages, when Tamil

came to be looked upon as a vernacular or the language of the slaves and when the Theory of Divine origin of Sanskrit came to be developed, nothing had any value except the Sanskrit works. Sivagnanabodham, for its very existence, had to pass off for a translation. It had to shine through its reflected light. Its greatness was traced to its Sanskrit version in the (ரௌரவ ஆகமம்) Rowrava Agama. That there is such a Sanskrit version, nobody can dispute. But anyone who reads the Tamil original and the Sanskrit version, without prejudice, can, at once, realise the vigour and grandeur of the Tamil work. The Tamil work is an artistic perfection, as is revealed by Sivagnanaswami's commentary. Not so the Sanskrit version; and it is not its fault; it gives only a rough and ready summary of the work and nothing more; in this it has succeeded exceedingly well. The last verse in Sanskrit clinches the issue: "Thus learn the conclusive truths of Saivism from Sivagnanabodham" - a patent admission that it is giving only the gist of some other work. If Meikandar took upon himself the serious task of translating a portion of a Sacred and Divine Text and admittedly no one is prepared to say that he is attempting to give us only the gist of the book, he could not have taken so

many liberties with his original as he must be takan to do, in the translation of almost every verse.

He is not only an author but the founder of a school of thought. He has himself, thus, taught this work to his disciples and that has resulted in the short but sweet commentary and those valuable illustrative verses, attached to these sutras. It is again an Indian usage to write a commentary on one's own work. The work, one may grant, represents the traditional teachings vouchsafed to him; and, in that sense, the thoughts, if not the language, may be old.

Meikandan (மெய்கண்டான்) means a seer. The Sanskrit phrase (சத்யஞான தரிசனி,) Satyagnana-darsini is but a translation of this term. The usage, prevalent in the intellectual world of the Tamils, is to christen a poet afresh, with the beautiful and suggestive phrase used by him, baptising him, as it were, in the white heat of his own poetic fire. "தொடித்தலை விழுத்தண்டினர்", "செம்புலப் பெயனீரார்" and a host of other names of the Sangam poets amply illustrate this usage. In a similar way, Meikandar was honoured by that name, by the grateful Tamil world of poetry and philosophy, since that name has occured as a beautiful and arresting phrase in various places in the body of his work.

"அறிந்து மறிவதே யாயு மறியா
தறிந்ததையும் விட்டங் கடங்கி—யறிந்த
தெதுவறிவு மன்றுகும் மெய்கண்டா னென்றின்
அதிஅது தான்என்னும் அகம்"

"அசத்தறியாய் சேள்நீ அறிவறிந்த எல்லாம்
அசத்தாகும் மெய்கண் டானயின்—அசத்தலாய்
நீரில் எழுத்தும் நிகழ்கனவும் பேய்த்தேரும்
ஓரின் அவை இன்றுமா றெறுப்பு"

"எண்ணிய சத்தன்று அசத்தன்றும் என்றுல்என்
கண்ணி உளதென்றல் மெய்கண்டான்—எண்ணி
அறிய இரண்டாம் அசத்தாதல் சத்தாம்
அறிவறியா மெய்நிவன் தாளா"

"உணர்ப அசத்தாதல் ஒன்றுஉணரா தொன்றை
உணரும் நீதான் உணராயாயின்—உணருமினித்
தானிரண் டாம்மெய்கண் டான்தன்னல் உணர்தலால்
தானிரண் டாய்க்காணன் தமி"

"பன்னிறமே காட்டும் படிகம்போல் இந்திரியம்
தன்னிறமே காட்டும் தகைநினைந்து—பன்னிறத்துப்
பொய்ப்புலனே வேறுணர்ந்து பொய்பொய்யா மெய்கண்டான்
மெய்ப்பொருட்குத் தைவமாம் வேறு."

Like Kutambai Siddhar (குதம்பைச் சித்தர்) Agappey Siddhar (அகப்பேய்ச் சித்தர்) and others who were christened after their phrases, even in later times, Meikandar also got his name from his own work. This point need not be laboured further.

Meikandar, as a great mystic, speaks in parables. His work is full of metaphors and

similes. What is beyond words cannot be expressed otherwise. His method of exposition is unique; his use of poetry and prose is significant. If one is to believe the anecdote of his explaining the nature of anavam (ஆணவம்) at the instance of his family preceptor and his future disciple (அருணந்திசிவாசாரியார்) Arunandi Sivachariar, a walking encyclopædia of learning, standing before him in the most arrogant and haughty mood of a pedantic examiner, when Meikandar is said to have pointed out to the interrogator himself as the embodiment of anavam (ஆணவம்), Meikandar must have had a keen sense of humour. The Socratic method probably started with him in Saiva philosophy; for, we have a new kind of philosophic composition springing up in the compilations of questions such as இருபா இருபஃது, வினவெண்பா etc.

There is no wonder, the world, whilst reading his book exclaims, "Here is a born seer a sam siddhar (சமுசித்தர்) and "Here is a child in all simplicity". Does not the poet sing "Heaven hovers about us in our infancy"— (Wordsworth). That was indeed a great truth which Christ taught to his followers by precept and practice.

Meikandar's life has another significance. He does not belong to any of the highest castes

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of Society and yet became the great master of all high castes, as well, in the Tamil land. No longer can it be said that salvation is the birth - right of higher castes and no others. It is no more a question of execptions like Vidura (விதுரன்) but a rule.This is indeed a revolutionary idea, which even Vyasa (வியாசர்) had not the courage to declare directly and openly. With Meikandan, thus begins a new era of spiritual equality, in South India, but alas a short lived one. After Periyapuranam (பெரிய புராணம்) singing the history of the saints from every low caste attaining salvation, this philosophic conclusion is inevitable, even as it is on the theory of Ashtamurta. But from what heights of spiritual greatness have we fallen to the present depths of degradation.

The modern trends in Western philosophy help us to explain the Saiva Siddhanta theory in terms of Western thought. Nothing more is claimed here; for, the Saiva Siddhanta thought has an intrinsic value of its own with its own proper phraseology. In carrying this message to the West, however, it has to be expressed in their terms. The Satkarya vada (சத்காரியவாதம்) can be interpreted in terms of the scientific theory of Causation. The Saivite Theory of matter, as a mere collection of qualities or aspects, reads like Bertrand Russel's theory of

matter as a logical construction out of a collection of aspects or sensations, with nothing more of the Thing-in-itself. The Neo-realists speak of sensations as the data and claim that an illusion as a sensation is as real as any other, reminding us of some of the portions in the commentary of Sivagnanaswami. Benedetto Croce's aesthetic theory that intuition is expression and that all our thoughts are but words is similar to that of Sivagnanaswami. The Saivite theory of perception can also be elaborated in terms of modern psychology. But physics and geography do not form the basis of Saiva Siddhanta thought. Bergson's Creative Evolution, though only to a certain extent, throws a flood of light on the Saivite theory of creation and tatvas (தத்துவம்). The Purna yoga (பூர்ண யோகம்) of Arabinda Gosh, will help us to explain the harmony of Meikandar's advaita conception. But one must guard against hasty generalisations or superficial identifications of systems of thought which will only rob us of the unique value and supreme significance of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

We must have a clean idea of the pattern of Saivism as an artistic whole. We have to look backwards and forwards. The civilisation of Sindh, the Svetasvataropanishad (சுவேதாசுவதர உபநிஷத்), the conception of Muruga, the

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theory of Ashtamurta and the Advaita theory of Meikandar—have been touched upon. Saivism has, thus, attempted at harmony from its very begining. In this sphere, Tirumular's (திருமூலர்) contribution is unique and fundamental. Many have spoken of love and many have predicated love of God. But it was Tirumular who first posited love as the fundamental principle and predicated God-head of this love. This is the glory of Saivism which is a religion of love, as no other religion is. Love being thus made divine is no longer blind but the quintessence of knowledge and bliss.

Tirugnanasambandar gives us an inward and artistic view of the happy universe representing the fatherhood and motherhood of God shining through and dancing in the midst of exterior nature. That is the harmony of the universe. Thirunavukkarasu's life gives us the deification of social service. That is the harmony of society. Sundarar's life is a complete surrender to God, who thereafter leads him through love and knowledge, through blindness and suffering to bliss and peace. That is the harmony of passions. Manikkavasagar sings of the intoxication of mystic experience as an infectious reality made possible by God taking an avatar, every time a soul has to be saved. That is the harmony of the mystic union.

In the Tamil land, the worshippers of Siva adopted the various tenets of the established schools of thought. Patanavada Saivism (பாடாண வாதம்) reminds us of the Vaiseshika conception of Salvation. A study of the other schools of Saivism expounded and criticised in Sankalpa Nirakaranam (சங்கற்ப நிராகரணம்) from this point of view will be fruitful. The Upanishad's thoughts are harmonised in the Saiva Siddhanta.

Sankara was a Tamilian and so was Ramanuja. But for these where could have been Indian philosophy so called ? A careful study of their works would disclose very many Tamilian conceptions. Sankara's theory of Leela or Divine play (லீலை), for instance, owes not a little to the Tamilian conception of Nataraja, which has moved the hearts of all the great artists of the world. Ramanuja definitely undertook to interpret the Upanishads in terms of Nalayiraprabandam (நாலாயிரப் பிரபந்தம்). Every one of these philosophies in spite of their professed polemics attempted at harmony from the Tamilian point of view. Even in Saiva Siddhanta, one must not lose sight of this underlying current of harmony, merely mislead by its criticism of the other Schools of thought. For, it is the very author of the Parapaksha (பரபக்கம்) in Sivagnana Siddhiar that has for the first time enunci-

ated the great theorem of universal religion as a perfect harmony of warring creeds and contradictory dogmas.

"ஓதுசம யங்கள் பொருளுணரு நூல்கள்
ஒன்றேடொன் றிருவ்வாமல் உளபலவும் இவற்றுள்
யாதுசமயம் பொருள்நூல் யாதிங் கென்னில்
இதுவாகும் அதுவல்ல தெனும்பிணக்க தின்றி
நீதியினல் இவையெல்லாம் ஓரிடத்தே காண
நின்றதியா தொருசமயம் அதுசமயம் பொருள்நூல்
ஆதலினல் இவையெல்லாம் அருமறைஆ கமத்தே
அடங்கியிடும் அவையிரண்டும் அரனடிக்கீழ் அடங்கும்"

—சித்தியார்

Tattuvarayar (தத்துவராயர்) attempted at a harmony of Saivite and Vaishnavite thoughts on an Advaitic basis. Santalinga (சாந்தலிங்கர்) and Kannudaya Vallal (கண்ணுடைய வள்ளல்) attempted it on the basis of the mystic experience, common to all schools of thought. A philosophical interpretation and a metaphysical basis were found for this attempt, by Chitambaraswami's explanation of the fundamental unity of all great Schools of thought. Tayumanavar (தாயுமானவர்) and after him Ramalingar of a very recent date have given us a synthesis of universal appeal.

Toleration implies condescension; and therefore mental arrogance. But Saivism, at its best, in all through its historic march was not

guilty of that spirit. Decay alone gives rise to such a spirit. In this establishment of harmony, Meikandar had a great hand and the Seers who came after him have only re-interpreted him in the language of their own times, trying to save the thought of Meikandar from the stagnation and intolerance of some of his professed followers of a too narrow outlook. Meikandar's thought understood in its proper perspective, thus, has a permanent value. May that truth shine for ever in its pristine purity!

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